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SANTAYANA AND MODERN LIBERAL PROTESTANTISM

I

PROFESSOR SANTAYANA'S work has come in years when thinking men have agreed, in general, upon the necessity of readjustments in the theory of religion and ethics. To many readers his restatement is especially significant as an attempt to indicate (rather than discuss) how the doctrines and forms of an old theology and of a still older mythology, may in a sense be retained in a new world characterized by reason. To other readers the work is noteworthy as a step toward setting ethics free from the restraints imposed by alleged authoritative institutions, and even from necessities supposedly inherent in physical nature. The author's literary style calls up before one the picture of a river—for the most part, smoothly flowing; sometimes so profound that its surface is quite dark, but as often tossing up a spray of epigram to glisten in the sunlight; occasionally, it must also be said, bearing in its current and sweeping out to sea something which has long served as a landmark of conduct or as a foundation of faith.

He challenges the ancient claims of religion to the possession of literal truth and moral authority. For him the historic formulations of faith in an objective sanction of the religious experience are not expressions of any actual conditions, but are rather reflections of things not seen as yet, things whose true meaning lies in the fact that they are desired and dreamed. And correspondingly, the moral pronouncements and demands of organized religion are unwarranted; they express not what must be, but what may be. For Santayana there are objective factors involved in all thought and effort; but these provide starting-points and abiding conditions rather than sanctions. The sanctions of religion and morality are not existential, unless the subsistential can be said to exist; they are not actual, unless the possible is in a sense actual; they are not real, except as ideals are real. In religion, as in other human pursuits, the bases of things are of less importance than their fulfilments. The "life of reason" consists in an organization of ex-

perience with reference to ideal ends. In primitive nations magical rites and mythical interpretations of nature and society marked the beginnings of this organization. Particularly in Greece, myths about the gods served political and ethical ends. But during the Christian centuries, owing to an influx of Aristotelian metaphysics and oriental mysticism, the older religious mythology, with its ethical function, has been sublimated into a non-verifiable doctrine of the existence of God, with attendant anomalies in the doctrines of creation, providence and redemption. This metaphysical and mystical influx Santayana would purge away, restoring the ancient quality of the myths in a philosophy freed from any implications concerning the external existence of its objects, a philosophy in which Christian theology would be rendered into a dramatic representation, a poetic symbol for the ethical virtues of piety toward the past, spirituality toward the ideal future, and charity for one's contemporaries.

It is difficult to meet such an argument with anything but assent —it exposes so much extravagance and punctures so many pretensions, it offers so much in the way of emancipation, and of an unspoiled, Grecian-like view of the world. In favor of it there is the testimony of many who, making a virtue of what they deem to be a necessity, find that the values of religion and ethics which once involved existential concepts, survive for them as poetry with a beauty enhanced, because no longer subjected to the contortions and mutilations once suffered for the sake of conformity to a world of existences, and with an ethical effectiveness increased, because frankly including elements of the imaginative which are able to lift one above any too narrowly empirical levels and goals.

II

But there are other thinkers for whom existence is itself a capital element in value, and for whom ideal fulfilments seem too precarious, if all they have in the universe, beyond their own inherent excellences as ideals, is a kind of natural spring-board from which to leap up. One leaps up from a spring-board, but one afterward comes down. The men who do not follow Santayana might not deny that ideals are worth while for their own sake, regardless of God or freedom or immortality; but they would hold that any given ideal, if it can be objectively sanctioned, must be said to have at least an added value. Among these men are the theologians—and their position is bound to be more and more interesting as the argument develops. It must be admitted that among them Santayana is slow to attain adequate recognition—but fifteen or twenty

years is not long in the history of thought. Sooner or later the question will arise; What do, or what can, the theologians say?

The question has fresh significance not with regard to those theologians who say what they have always said, but with regard to the more liberal thinkers who would greatly modify, but still, in the large, justify the historic claims of the Church. For these latter, it would have to be argued, first, that the case of Santayana *v.* the theologians is a case, so to speak, not in law but in equity—one which should be tried, not according to the letter of ecclesiastical standards, but according to the spirit of contemporary thinkers, as yet not formulated into anything like dogma.

If this change of venue be allowed, attention ought to be called to some facts which it may be well to have on record for purposes beyond that of the present case, because critics of the Church so often fail to allow for them. The liberal Protestant thinkers are not troubled by the fact, for instance, that Hebraism took over Babylonian and Persian myths. Nor are they disturbed to think that Christianity took over a Hebraist Bible, or a Roman polity, or a Greek philosophy, or any other fruit of pagan custom or barbarian genius. It has never been any humiliation to Christianity to acknowledge its manifold indebtedness; the theologians, in fact, glory in this assimilative capacity of the movement and look to see it absorb other human values and achievements as it goes along. Modern Protestantism knows, again, that the ancient arguments for the existence of God, for his attributes of omniscience, omnipotence, and so on, and for the persons of the Trinity are to be reckoned not so much among men's logical achievements as among their psychological data—the facts are that men have tried to find God by thinking of him along these lines. But these unmanageable arguments are now seen to mark the limits of thinking rather than to constitute the fruits thereof. The liberal Protestants, no less than Santayana, accept these modifications of older views.

Of the chief points wherein they differ, one is made by those whom Santayana might call mystics, and the other by those whom he might call fanatics, but the Republic of Philosophy is a free country, in which epithets are not necessarily epitaphs.

First, a point easily allied with mysticism, though really independent of it. The liberal Protestant can still say that Santayana *does not disprove* the essential doctrine of theism; he shifts the ground of discussion, but he must still *leave room for faith,* whether the theologian can find anything positive to put in that room or not. Reason, says the theologian, need not expect to exhaust the content of religion—because religion belongs essentially not to reason, but to the wider realm of life. Reason is, after all, a dissection and a

fixation of reality; and the world of reality, in its basis as well as in its fulfilment, is at least as likely to be personal as to be impersonal. It is possible, perhaps even unavoidable, in thinking to separate the concomitants, and to say that everything social, personal, or teleological is in us, and that the rest of the world is impersonal and mechanical; or, as Santayana puts it (*Reason in Religion,* p. 249) "the value of existences is wholly borrowed from their ideality, without direct consideration of their fate, while the existence of ideals is wholly determined by natural forces, without direct relation to their fulfilment. Existence and ideal value can, therefore, be initially felt and observed apart." But the Protestant thinkers would regard this as a dubious way of dealing ultimately with the world. They hold that, however convenient such distinctions may be for certain purposes, there are other values which such a distinction cuts through and destroys. If this be mysticism, or anti-intellectualism, or absolute idealism, they would say, make the most of it; but one has to choose between some such inclusiveness of reason's distinctions within a living unity, or, on the other hand, a stopping short of an abstracting reason before any adequate account has been rendered of the concrete world.

So the first point of the theologians, albeit negative, would be that, with all Santayana says, there is still room for faith in an objective sanction of religious experiences. The second point would be that liberal Protestantism has something positive to offer as a content of faith. It is necessary here to be pious in the Santayanian sense, but it is also no more than just. Men for whom the absurdity of a *Hamlet* with the Prince of Denmark left out has passed into a proverb must in an estimate of Christianity afford more than a passing mention of its founder. For the Protestant theologians, accounts with Jesus of Nazareth are not settled when he is called the hero of an epic or one of the characters of a drama. There is no question among the theologians that myths galore have gathered around the historic character; there are wide differences of opinion among them as to how much in the records is picture and how much is frame. Many of them make the mistake of thinking of Jesus apart from the movement to which he gave the chief formative impulse; but some, like Troeltsch, would think of the two together—and it could then be said that not in Christ alone, but in Christendom, we have a great concrete social process which, like the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic, may show that the ocean of history is not altogether an unresponsive tumbling of waters. The liberal theologians regard the Christian movement as so significant that they can conceive nothing else worthy of the faith—which, as we saw, they regard as possible—than that

the movement is the human working out of a trans-human process, which they go on to identify with a superhuman plan. So far as the argument goes, it would appear that they might be content with a "religion of humanity," in which God could be thought of as "the common will." But, because the movement of Christendom is worth more to them than anything else in the world, they think of the rest of the world as involved with it and under the same auspices. Either, as idealists, they proffer a demonstration that it can not be otherwise, or else, as pragmatists, they say that the chance is worth taking, and that the belief progressively verifies itself. Value judgments, and processes by other names that mean the same, are the basis for a claim of a substantial truth and an attendant moral authority for the pronouncements of the Church. The Christian writings are held to be true in the sense that, although often cast in the forms of myth and legend, they record what are held to have been actual experiences with a superhuman power; and they are held to have moral authority in the sense that, although often formulated in outgrown and impossible precepts, they contain a fund of accumulated experience which can not be disregarded because it is linked up with that superhuman power, which either controls or aspires to control the universe.

Santayana apparently has in mind efforts like those of the pragmatists when he says (p. 206) "An oracular morality or revealed religion can hope to support its singular claims only by showing its general conformity to natural reason and its perfect beneficence in the world." The pragmatist theologians would reply that not all this is necessary—that the claims of Christianity to the measure of truth and authority noted above would be justified, even if not absolutely established, by showing that these claims do not contradict the requirements of reason, and involve an increasing measure of beneficence in an evolving world.

III

If the case were tried before a judge gifted with insight it might very well be adjourned pending the gathering of fresh evidence and its reformulation; for both Santayana and the Protestant theologians exhibit the same weakness—namely, a failure to thoroughly consider the problem afforded by the material universe.

In the case of Santayana, the problem is indeed considered; but the fact that he recognizes it leaves him open to a criticism of inconsistency. He says, in a passage above cited, that "a complete description would lay bare physical necessities in the ideals entertained and inevitable ideal harmonies among the facts discovered." Again (*Reason in Society,* p. 192), "The community recognized in patriotism is imbedded in a larger one embracing all living creatures.

While in some respects we find sympathy the more complete the nearer home we remain, in another sense there is no true companionship except with the universe." Once more (*Reason in Religion*): "Human life, lying as it does in the midst of a larger process, will surely not be without some congruity with the universe (p. 249)." "Why should we not regard the universe with piety? . . . Where there is such infinite and laborious potency there is room for every hope (p. 191)." But he does not follow out such possibilities, and it may be urged that it is somewhat premature to relegate all objective sanctions to the realm of poetry before such possibilities have been explored.

The older theologians disregarded the material universe as a thing evil and unworthy; the newer theologians, as we saw, adopt it into their theistic systems without any very close examination. They ground their arguments for objective sanctions elsewhere, and fail even to try out the constructive possibilities of materialism.

If it could be shown that there is ground for holding that the structure of the universe—or perhaps better, the structure of *a* universe large enough and detailed enough to correspond to the fields of the sciences—is like the structure of our bodies or our brains or our societies, we might have the benefit of considerations which are now scouted or disregarded. Such a structural resemblance if it could be demonstrated would not show in Fechnerian fashion that the universe has a soul, or a mind, or a consciousness; but it might show that such a soul or mind or consciousness as we manifest in our most significant social movements—that is, in our religions—is a kind of concentrated essence of the world-process, a focusing lens which unites in one image what would otherwise be a flood of imperfectly correlated rays. It is conceivable that thus the natural basis might be shown to have more kinship than Santayana allows with the ideal fulfilment.

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INTELLIGENCE AND BEHAVIOR

IT is now approximately four years since the appearance of the volume entitled *Creative Intelligence,* in which a group of writers undertook to set forth certain views concerning the nature and implications of intelligence. The doctrine of intelligence embodied in this book has recently been subjected to a keen and discriminating analysis by Professor Lovejoy.[1] The quality of the

[1] This JOURNAL, Vol. XVII., pp. 589–596 and 622–632.